

Report to the 64th Legislature



Prepared by

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

The Wildlife Division

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Montana is fortunate to have a program dedicated to upland game bird habitats and hunting access. The Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program (UGBEP) advances game bird conservation, providing the means for FWP and its partners to work directly with interested landowners to achieve abundant game bird populations. As changes in land uses intensify and hunting access becomes more difficult to acquire, the value of the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program (UGBEP) appreciates.

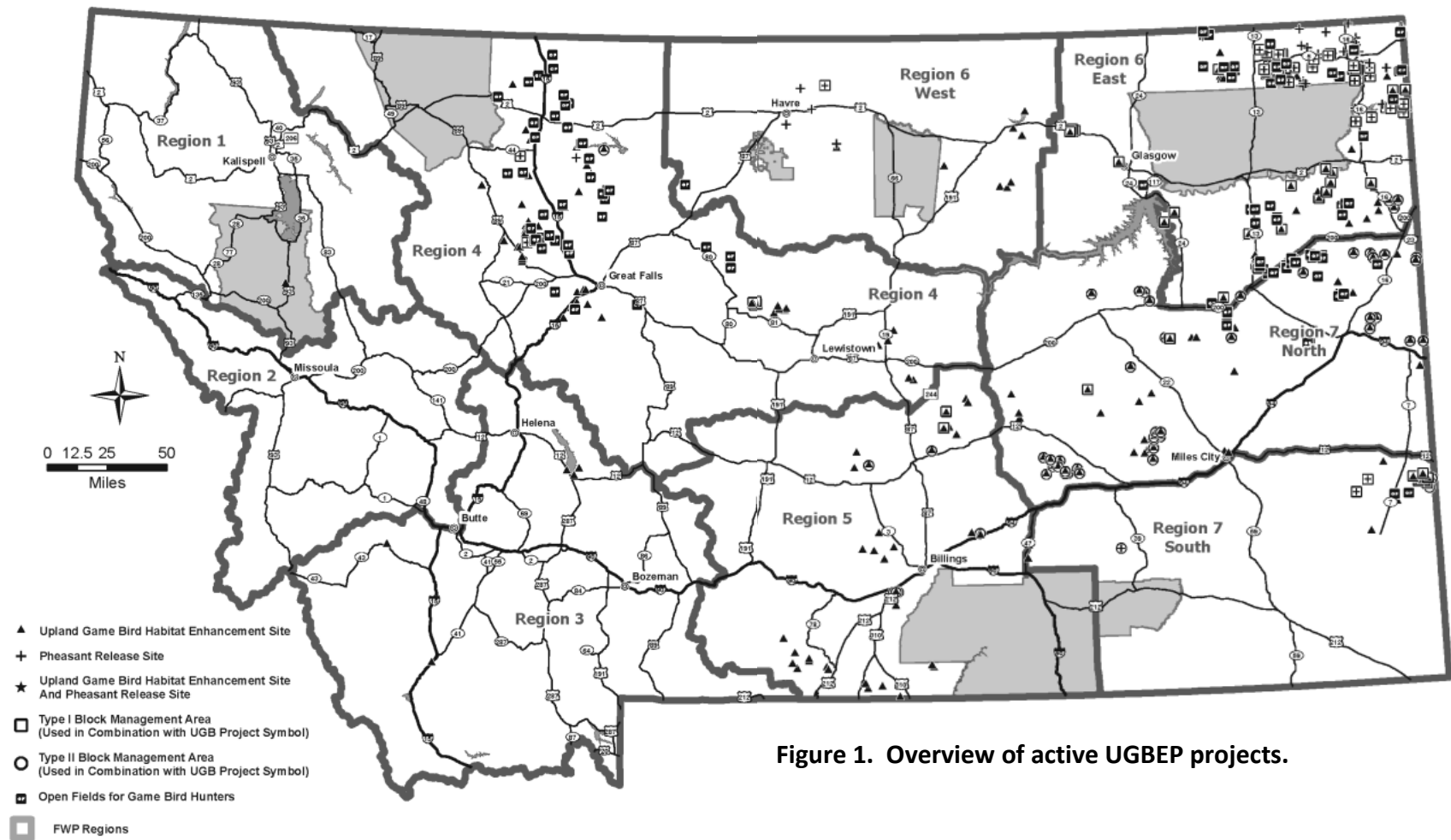


Figure 1. Overview of active UGBEP projects.

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Program Goal

To efficiently and responsibly conserve and enhance upland game bird habitats and populations—providing quality public hunting opportunities for upland game birds for present and future generations.

INTRODUCTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) administers the statewide Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program (UGBEP), which is organized into two key programs:

1. Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program (Montana ARM 12.9.7)
2. Upland Game Bird Release Program (Montana ARM 12.9.6)

The principle outcomes of the UGBEP are:

- establishment or enhancement of upland game bird habitats;
- conservation of valuable game bird habitats;
- enhanced public upland game bird hunting opportunities
- release of pen-reared pheasants into suitable habitats; and
- wild turkey transplants;

On Page 2, Figure 1 provides an overview of active UGBEP projects, which include habitat enhancement project and pheasant release sites that occurred on private and public lands.

This biennial report chronicles program achievements, summarizes revenue and expenditures, and tabulates habitat enhancement projects and upland game bird releases conducted in FY 2013 and FY 2014. This biennial report is intended for Montana legislators, the UGBEP Citizens' Advisory Council (CAC), FWP staff, and interested organizations and citizens.

BIENNIAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Several unique program milestones were accomplished during FY 2013 and FY 2014 and are highlighted in the section below. A more comprehensive review of habitat accomplishments is summarized on Page 22 of this report.

OPEN FIELDS FOR GAME BIRD HUNTERS

One of the more prominent outcomes of FY 2013 was the debut of Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters. The Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters provides a payment to landowners enrolled in CRP who provide walk-in public hunting for game birds. In FY 2013, these projects were funded through the USDA Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP), a competitive federal grant program authorized under the Food Security Act. Open Fields applies to private lands enrolled in the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) within focus areas in Regions 4, 6, and 7 (Table 1 on Page 8). Focus areas were delineated in counties that had the potential to enhance bird populations and maximize hunter recreation (Figure 2). Letters were

sent to nearly 2,400 landowners within the focus areas inviting them to apply to Open Fields. Eligible lands were restricted to properties that could be accessed by public routes and were not actively enrolled in Upland Game Bird Enhancement or Block Management programs. Hence, nearly all of the Open Field contracts involved cooperators who were new to FWP's programs.

The objectives of these projects were to provide incentives to private landowners to:

- (1) enroll new lands into CRP during the 2012 USDA-Farm Service Agency general sign-up;
- (2) maintain current enrollments in CRP;
- (3) use an incentive payment to restrict haying or grazing of CRP beyond what is required for maintenance; and
- (4) provide hunters with free public walk-in access on private lands for fall game bird hunting.

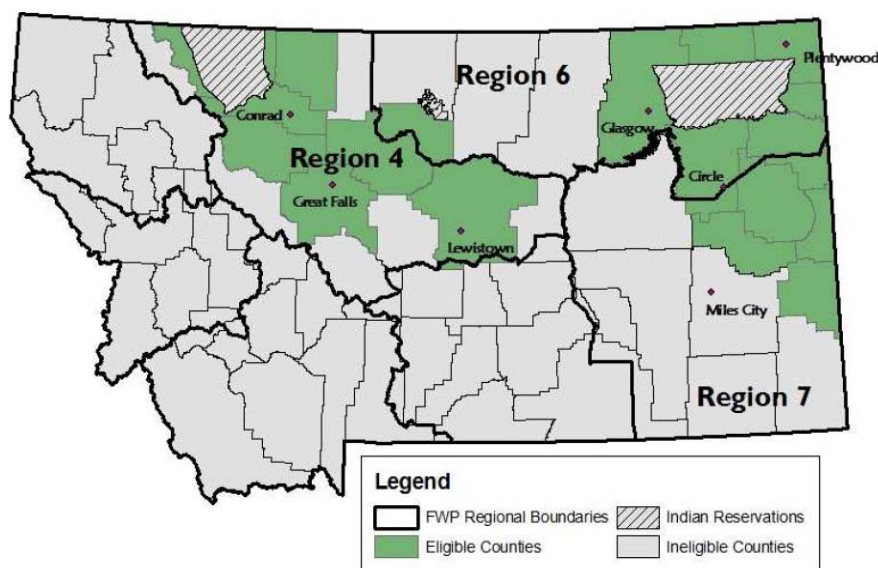


Figure 2. Map showing counties eligible (focus areas) for Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters.

Landowners enrolled in Open Fields received a onetime payment of \$5 per CRP acre (maximum 160 CRP acres) for each year the land is enrolled in the CRP program. Enrollment was voluntary but competitive, based on scoring criteria. Prospective enrollees could offer additional acres for walk-in access, which enhanced their application scores. Once enrolled, landowners are required to follow the USDA Farm Service Agency standard maintenance plans, but forego any additional emergency haying or grazing opportunities during the duration of their CRP contract.

Enrolled lands are clearly posted to identify the area open to walk in game bird hunting (Figure 3). The Open Fields program provides walk-in hunting for game birds with no further permission required. Maps show boundaries of lands enrolled in Open Fields and are available online or published with the UGBEP Access Guide (Figure 4).



Figure 3. Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters program sign.

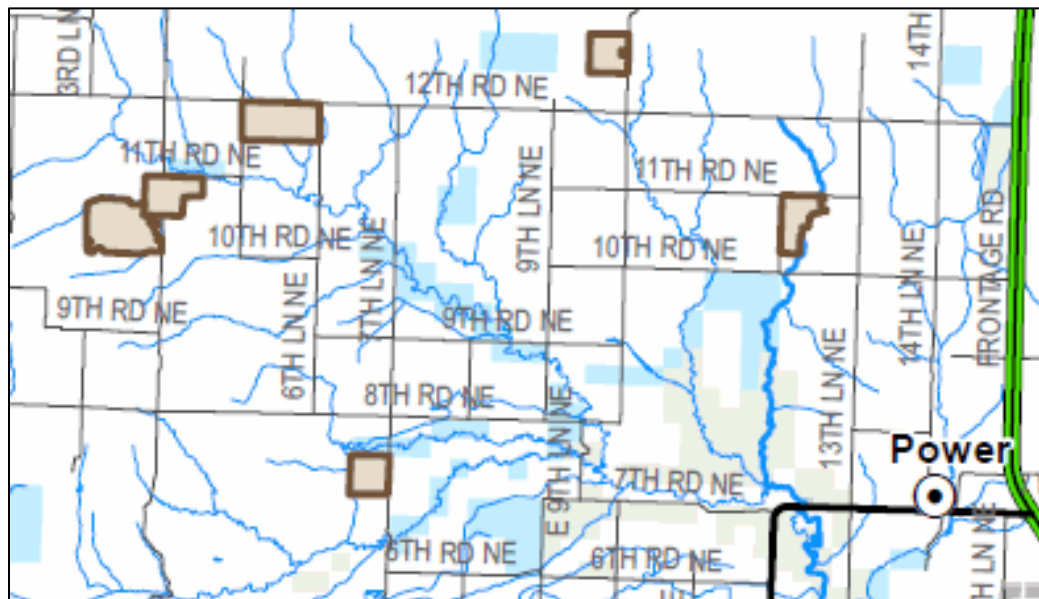


Figure 4. An example of the Open Fields project map. Enrolled lands are delineated by the brown polygons.

Open Field enrollments were also integrated into FWP's Interactive Hunt Planner, a comprehensive online tool of various geographical map layers that provides hunters with location information of hunting access opportunities and associated instructions for gaining permission. Figure 5 is a screen shot example from the Hunt Planner program, which depicts

Open Fields sites (brown polygons), UGBEP project sites (green symbols), and Block Management Areas (gray polygons).

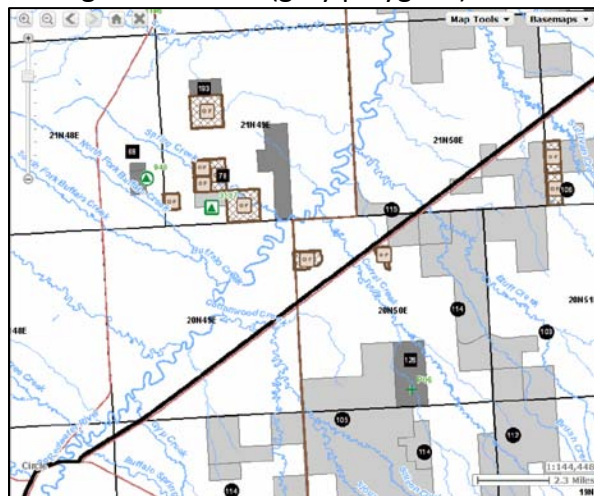


Figure 5. An image from the online Hunt Planner.

Based on the large volume of interest expressed by landowners in FY 2013 and positive feedback received from hunters, a second Open Fields enrollment period was launched in FY 2014. Projects were funded entirely by the UGBEP. Eligibility criteria and implementation remained similar to the FY 2013 enrollment.

Through the past 2 years, the UGBEP enrolled 97 Open Fields projects, involving nearly 14,000 acres of CRP and, with additional enrolled lands, provided over 33,000 acres of walk-in game bird hunting access (Table 1). The average Open Fields contract will last for 9 hunting seasons. The continued conservation of CRP and other quality game bird habitats while providing free public access remains a high priority for UGBEP. Open Fields has proven to be a popular and effective conservation tool.

FWP recently secured \$491,000 through another VPA-HIP grant to expand the Open Fields program. See Page 39 for more details.

Table 1. Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters program summary.

Region	# Contracts		CRP Acres		Additional Access Acres		Total Acres (CRP + Add'l Access)		Expenditures (\$)¹	
	FY13	FY14	FY13	FY14	FY13	FY14	FY13	FY14	FY13	FY14
4	22	16	3,177	2,347	2,676	5,412	5,853	7,759	116,270	100,430
6	18	17	2,736	2,263	3,148	2,977	5,884	5,240	99,235	89,245
7	15	9	2,199	1,261	2,843	2,247	5,042	3,508	90,903	55,145
Annual Total	55	42	8,112	5,871	8,667	10,636	16,779	16,507	306,408	244,820
Combined Total	97		13,983		19,303		33,286		551,228	

¹FY 2013 funded by VPA-HIP grant; FY 2014 funded by UGBEP

UGBEP ARM RULES

In response to the newly adopted strategic plan, the department revised and adopted Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) to help implement the plan and to provide greater clarity for program administration, consistent with UGBEP CAC recommendations. Significant rule changes adopted on September 7, 2012, include:

Upland Game Bird Release Program (12.9.6)

- 15% funding cap for pheasant releases, wild turkey transplants, and emergency supplemental feeding. The 15% cap is further divided into three portions: 87% (pheasant release), 3% (wild turkey transplants), and 10% (emergency supplemental feeding).
- New annual pheasant release application deadline: January 15
- Applicants may apply annually for up to 5 years for pheasant releases. An additional 5 years of releases may be authorized if significant habitat enhancement activities take place.
- Stronger emphasis on pheasant health and recognition of the department's right to refuse to pay for and release pheasants that appear unhealthy.
- A new application selection process for when the number of applications exceeds available funding.
- Emergency/supplemental feeding confined to Sheridan, Daniels, and Roosevelt counties.
- Additional refinement of supplemental feeding rules.

Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program (12.9.7)

- Maintenance costs are defined as separate from project expenses, particularly in relationship to the project spending cap referenced in statute (87-1-248, MCA).
- Program definitions are included in rule as described in the strategic plan.
- Revised rule on contract violations by project cooperators that changed wording from "will" be disqualified to "may" be disqualified. This change allows FWP to take into account unexpected events beyond the cooperator's control such as natural disasters such as fire or drought as well as other circumstances.
- Habitat projects may be considered on private land less than 100 acres if the project is adjacent to larger areas of public land that support public access.
- FWP may use other department funds and resources to provide cost-share for UGBEP projects.
- Removed language that emphasizes program funding on private lands as a higher priority than public areas. Under this revision, public and private lands will have equal priority where applicable.
- The department's 75% cost-share cap is removed to allow for percentages to be negotiated by field staff based on project value, length, and priority.
- The NRCS standard cost list – and other relevant standard cost lists – may now be used to establish program payment levels for project costs such as fences,

shelterbelts, etc. This is an alternative to paying for project costs based on actual expense receipts.

HABITAT FOREVER PARTNERSHIPS

Between 2008 and 2012, FWP partnered with Habitat Forever, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and local Pheasant Forever (PF) chapters through Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) to support farming activities in Billings and Denton that resulted in enhanced upland game bird habitats on lands open to the public. On December 31, 2012, the two MOUs expired. In order to ensure existing habitat projects were maintained, the department solicited requests for proposals from prospective contractors to continue work in the Billings and Denton vicinities. In April 2013, the department awarded Habitat Forever 2 contracts to continue these habitat enhancement activities. Both contracts are scheduled to expire on December 31, 2017.

The primary purpose of these contracts is to conduct intensive habitat enhancements and maintenance activities to improve habitat for game birds and other wildlife. The outcome of these activities not only provides productive habitat for upland game birds but also provides quality opportunities for upland game bird hunters in areas where hunting access is limited.

Habitat enhancement and maintenance accomplishments during the past biennium are described below for each of these contracts.

REGION 4 DENTON-BASED FARMING (FWP/HF/PF PARTNERSHIP)

The following projects have been developed and subsequently maintained by the Central Montana Chapter of Pheasants Forever (CMCPF) and the Habitat Forever Habitat Specialist. This partnership primarily focuses on 4 properties: PF Coffee Creek (800 deeded acres of access); PF Wolf Creek (1,000 deeded acres of access); DNRC Wolf Creek (2,500 acres of access); and the Beckman WMA (6,568 acres of access), totaling nearly 11,000 acres of hunting opportunity.

Throughout the biennium, habitat work included new enhancement activities and maintenance of existing projects (Table 2), including establishment of over 3 miles of silver sagebrush (double rows) on the PF Wolf Creek property (Figure 6). Ongoing maintenance efforts include mechanical tillage, in-row hand weeding, control of currant worms in the golden currant and tent caterpillars in the chokecherries, spraying and cultivating field bindweed infestations, and food plots.

In FY 2013, the UGBEP contributed \$56,761 to enhance and maintain 133 acres on nearly 40 project sites. In FY 2014, the UGBEP contributed \$58,132 to enhance and maintain 183 acres on 46 project sites (Table 2).



Figure 6. Planting silver sagebrush on PF Wolf Creek property.

Table 2. Summary of habitat enhancement and maintenance activities: Denton.

Note regarding Table 2: Numbers in parentheses indicate existing projects that have been maintained.

	FY2013		FY2014	
Beckman WMA Projects	Total Project Sites¹	Total Habitat Acres¹	Total Project Sites¹	Total Habitat Acres¹
Nesting Cover/Food Plot	1	10	2	63
Food Plot	(4)	(5)	(4)	(6)
Shelterbelt	3(2)	8(7)	1 (3)	8 (7)
Silver Sage Travel Corridors	(9)	(7 acres, 36 miles of double rows)	(9)	(7 acres, 36 miles of double rows)
Sub-total	4(15)	18(28)	3(16)	63(20)

	FY2013		FY2014	
DNRC Wolf Creek Projects	Total Project Sites¹	Total Habitat Acres¹	Total Project Sites¹	Total Habitat Acres¹
Shelterbelt	1	4	(1)	(4)
Food Plot			1	2
Sub-total	1	4	1(1)	2(4)

	FY2013		FY2014	
PF Wolf Creek Projects	Total Project Sites¹	Total Habitat Acres¹	Total Project Sites¹	Total Habitat Acres¹
Shelterbelt	(2)	(6)	(1)	(7)
Silver Sage Travel Corridors	(6)	(4 acres, 3 miles of double-rows)	(6)	(4 acres, 3 miles of double-rows)
Food Plot			2	2
Sub-total	(8)	(10)	2(7)	2(11)

	FY2013		FY2014	
PF Coffee Creek Projects	Total Project Sites¹	Total Habitat Acres¹	Total Project Sites¹	Total Habitat Acres¹
Food Plot	(6)	(27)	(9)	(39)
Nesting Cover (DNC)	(1)	(3)		
Shelterbelt	(7)	(37)	(4)	(34)
Brood Cover			(2)	(2)
Sub-total	(14)	(67)	(15)	(75)

	FY2013		FY2014	
DNRC Coffee Creek Project	Total Project Sites¹	Total Habitat Acres¹	Total Project Sites¹	Total Habitat Acres¹
Food Plot	(1)	(6)	(1)	(6)
Sub-total	(1)	(6)	(1)	(6)

Grand Total	FY2013		FY2014	
	Total Project Sites¹	Total Habitat Acres¹	Total Project Sites¹	Total Habitat Acres¹
	10(38)	22(111)	6(40)	67(116)

¹Numbers in parentheses indicate existing projects that have been maintained.

REGION 5 BILLINGS-BASED FARMING (FWP/HF/BLM PARTNERSHIP)

Partnership funding in support of the Billings Habitat Forever farm work is intended for restoring and enhancing pheasant and other upland game bird habitat on public lands open to hunting along the Yellowstone River and its major tributaries in Yellowstone, Treasure, Stillwater, Carbon, Bighorn, and Sweetgrass counties in Montana. Supporting partners include the Yellowstone Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever, Billings Rod & Gun Club, Montana Chapter of Safari Club, and Conoco Phillips.

During the biennium, efforts continued to focus on three tracts of public land: BLM Pompey's Pillar, Sundance Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA), and the Yellowstone Wildlife Management Area (Table 3). In FY 2014, habitat enhancements on Sundance SRMA were gradually phased out because of the increasing rate of recreational activities that conflict with the production of upland game bird habitat.

Habitat enhancements included irrigated food plots, dry land food plots, irrigated nesting cover, dry land nesting cover, irrigated brood plots, wetland development, water development, riparian vegetation restoration, and shelterbelt/winter cover plantings and maintenance (Figure 7).

In FY 2013, the UGBEP contributed \$40,160 to enhance and maintain over 200 acres on nearly 31 project sites. In FY 2014, the UGBEP contributed \$52,412 to enhance and maintain over 314 acres on 29 project sites (Table 3). These project enhancements provide a combined total of 4,830 acres of public access for upland game bird hunting.

Table 3. Summary of Habitat Forever enhancement and maintenance activities: Billings.
 Note regarding Table 3: Numbers in parentheses indicate existing projects that have been maintained.

	FY2013		FY2014	
BLM Pompey's Pillar Projects	Total Project Sites ¹	Total Habitat Acres ¹	Total Project Sites ¹	Total Habitat Acres ¹
Nesting Cover (Irrigated)	(9)	(114)	(11)	(123)
Food Plot (Irrigated)	(3)	(44)	(2)	(28)
Nesting Cover (Irrigated) + Brood Plots	NA	NA	1	8
Food Plot (Irrigated) + Wetland	NA	NA	1	16
Nesting/Wetland/Brood	(1)	(8)	(1)	(8)
Brood/Food Plot	(1)	(3)	(1)	(3)
Sub-total	(14)	(169)	2(15)	24(162)

	FY2013		FY2014	
BLM Sundance SRMA Projects	Total Project Sites ¹	Total Habitat Acres ¹	Total Project Sites ¹	Total Habitat Acres ¹
Nesting Cover	(6)	(34.8)	NA	NA
Sub-total	(6)	(34.8)	NA	NA

	FY2013		FY2014	
Yellowstone WMA Projects	Total Project Sites ¹	Total Habitat Acres ¹	Total Project Sites ¹	Total Habitat Acres ¹
Food Plot (Irrigated)	(2)	(20.7)	(2)	(16)
Nesting Cover (Irrigated)	(3)	(54.3)	(3)	(60)
Nesting Cover (Dryland)	(4)	(8.4)	(5)	(31)
Wetland Development	(1)	(3.3)	(1)	(21)
Shelterbelt/Brood Plot	(1)	(0.2)	(1)	(0.2)
Sub-total	(11)	(87)	(12)	(128.2)

	FY2013		FY2014	
Grand Total	Total Project Sites ¹	Total Habitat Acres ¹	Total Project Sites ¹	Total Habitat Acres ¹
	(31)	(201)	2(27)	24(290.2)



Figure 7. Sorghum provides excellent winter cover and food for pheasants and other wildlife (Yellowstone WMA).

REVISED PROGRAM WEB PAGE

The department's web page is a large clearinghouse of information available to hunters, recreationists, educators, and other people interested in FWP. To make the UGBEP web page more visible, links to program information pertinent to landowners or hunters are listed on FWP's home page. Additionally, the link to the default program web page has been shortened to: fwp.mt.gov/ugbep.

The default program page was also redesigned to a more user-friendly visual presentation, rather than a text-heavy layout (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Layout of the UGBEP home page.

CARAGANA PROMOTION

During March 2013, a pilot outreach effort was conducted by FWP to promote habitat enhancement partnerships through the UGBEP. The target areas for the promotion were in Regions 4, 6, and 7. Promotional letters were sent to 156 cooperators who recently participated in the UGBEP pheasant release program but had not participated in the habitat enhancement cost-share program.

To participate in the promotion, landowners were encouraged to contact their local biologist to learn more about the Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program. In return, the landowner would receive 50 caragana seedlings to plant in an existing shelterbelt with no further commitment (i.e., no UGBEP contract).

Out of the 156 letters sent, approximately 52 (33%) were returned undeliverable for a variety of reasons. Namely, many of the landowners hold temporary addresses and live elsewhere during the winter months.

Through this pilot effort, 7 landowners responded to the promotion and contacted their local biologist. The UGBEP expended a total of \$260 to purchase 350 caragana seedlings for the interested landowners.

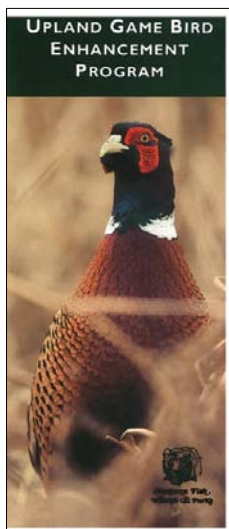
While the response rate was not as high as it was hoped, program staff gained valuable information about program outreach. For example, many agricultural producers leave their primary residence during winter and did not receive the announcements.

In the future, similar promotions will be held to raise landowner awareness of the habitat enhancement opportunities available through the UGBEP.

FABRIC MULCH

To help facilitate program purchases and meet State procurement requirements, the UGBEP established a 2-year contract to purchase fabric mulch for UGBEP shelterbelt projects through a supplier. Under this contract, field staff can place mulch fabric orders and provide a date needed for shipment. The cost for 1 roll of 6' x 300' fabric is \$108, which includes freight.

UGBEP BROCHURE



The program brochure was revised in FY 2013 to provide field staff with an outreach product that contains updated program information (Figure 9). The brochure serves to welcome interested landowners to the program while providing detailed highlights on eligibility and program requirements.

Figure 9. The new UGBEP brochure features program details and eligibility requirements.

LIFE AFTER CRP PUBLICATION

An article in the November-December 2010 *Montana Outdoors* publication reported “Congressional cutbacks and high commodity prices are compelling landowners to convert Conservation Reserve Program grasslands—which benefit pheasants, ducks, and other prairie wildlife—back to crops.” In response to this issue, a booklet modeled after a North Dakota publication was produced through a collaborative effort of the following Montana agencies and organizations: Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, Ducks Unlimited, and Pheasants Forever.

This Montana publication is intended to provide landowners and operators with guidance on ways to manage expired CRP acres for profitability, while maintaining at least some benefits for pheasants and other wildlife. Included with this publication is an insert that contains contact information and up-to-date information on various conservation and habitat programs available to landowners and lessees. Both the publication and insert are available online at fwp.mt.gov/ugbep.

FARM SERVICE AGENCY AND FWP MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

In FY 2014, FWP and Farm Service Agency (FSA) staff worked together on an MOU that provides a framework to share information important for conservation efforts. This MOU is especially important for Open Fields program implementation because landowner contact information is unavailable to the public and considered confidential. The agreement will allow FWP, in cooperation with FSA, to direct outreach to eligible landowners for enrollment opportunities.

BIENNIAL EXPENDITURES

Table 4 identifies the beginning revenues for FY 2013 and FY 2014 and reports the license revenues and expenditures. Habitat enhancement expenditures increased from \$334,373 in FY 2013 to \$387,273 in FY 2014. In addition to FY 2013 habitat enhancement expenditures, the program expended over \$306,000 from a USDA Voluntary Public Access – Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) grant to fund Open Fields projects (Table 5). In FY 2014, VPA-HIP funds were unavailable; the UGBEP funded Open Fields projects.

Administrative expenditures in FY 2013 and FY 2014 were \$163,412 and \$165,773, respectively (Table 4). These expenditures included all costs attributable to the overall operation and implementation of the program, including personnel and operations costs of the UGBEP coordinator and a portion of the 3 upland game bird habitat biologist positions. The 3 UGBEP Habitat Biologists positions were also funded by Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid dollars (Table 5). All three of the Habitat Biologists positions were vacant for 7 months, through the end of the biennium.

The 12-member UGBEP CAC met 4 times during FY 2013 and FY 2014. Expenditures included daily honorariums, mileage and lodging costs, per-diem allowances, and meeting expenses (Table 4).

Administrative expenditures also included \$39,000 of support toward a sage-grouse grazing evaluation study conducted in collaboration with NRCS, University of Montana, and Montana State University. The funds served as match for a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG).

The program expended \$79,568 and \$75,535 on pheasant releases in FY 2013 and FY 2014, respectively. The expenditures continue to decline each fiscal year, due in part to decreasing cooperator interest and loss of CRP pheasant habitat. For example, Montana's Hi-Line lost 41% of CRP since 2004 (source: USDA—CRP acres in Montana's Prairie Pothole Region, 2013). Pheasant releases are only conducted in areas with suitable habitat (87-1-248(1), MCA).

BIENNIAL REVENUE

The UGBEP is primarily funded by license dollars and receives the following for each license sold:

- resident upland game bird (includes combination sports) = \$2
- nonresident upland game bird (includes combination sports) = \$23
- 3-day nonresident upland game bird = \$10

The 3-day nonresident license, at \$50 each, began in 2013 and 1,911 licenses were sold. At the time of this report (December 2014), 1,913 3-day nonresident upland game bird licenses have

been sold. In comparison, 5,144 nonresident bird licenses were sold (\$110 per license) in LY 2013, the lowest number sold in 10 years (10-year average of nonresident upland bird licenses sold is 6,826).

License revenue for FY 2013 and FY 2014 was \$611,401 and \$586,821, respectively (Table 4).

Table 4. UGBEP biennial revenue and spending.

FY 2013						
UGBEP FUNDING (\$)		FY 2013 EXPENDITURES (\$)				BALANCE SUMMARY (\$)
FY 2013 Beginning Balance	License Revenue	Bird Planting	Habitat Enhancement	Admin¹	Total Expenditures	FY 2013 Year End Balance
3,188,244	611,401	79,568	334,373	163,412	611,832	3,187,811
¹ Administrative expenditures include \$11,259 for the UGBEP CAC and \$14,000 match for the Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG).						
FY 2014						
UGBEP FUNDING (\$)		FY 2014 EXPENDITURES (\$)				BALANCE SUMMARY (\$)
FY 2014 Beginning Balance	License Revenue	Bird Planting	Habitat Enhancement	Admin¹	Total Expenditures	FY 2014 Year End Balance
3,187,811	586,821	75,535	387,273	165,773	628,581	3,146,053
¹ Administrative expenditures include \$8,709 for the UGBEP CAC and \$25,000 match for the Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG).						

87-1-246 and 87-1-247, MCA

Table 5. Non-license funds that contributed to the UGBEP.

	FY 2013			FY 2014		
Source	Habitat Enhancement	Admin	Total Expenditures	Habitat Enhancement	Admin	Total Expenditures
Pittman-Robertson	NA	164,493	164,493	NA	90,144	90,144
VPA-HIP	306,271	NA	306,271	NA		
TOTALS			470,764			

OBLIGATED FUNDS

The FY 2014 ending balance for the UGBEP was \$3,146,053 (Table 4). Of these funds, \$1,723,502 has been obligated to specific contracts. Table 6 provides a breakdown of these obligations.

In consideration of the unspent, yet obligated funds noted in Table 4, over half of the FY 2014 ending balance (\$3,146,053) has been obligated. The adjusted FY 2014 ending balance of unobligated funds was \$1,422,551.

Table 6. Program funds currently obligated to completed projects or grant commitments.

Program Type	Amount (\$)
UGBEP: Habitat enhancement contracts	149,222
Habitat Forever: 5-year contractual agreements	591,744
Open Fields: Payments due FY18	112,536
Volunteer Public Access – Habitat Incentives Program Grant (match commitment)	450,000
Pheasant Bend Conservation Easement	100,000
National Wild Turkey Federation Cooperative Wildlife Biologist (match commitment)	120,000
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant (match commitment)	200,000
Total	1,723,502

UPLAND GAME BIRD RELEASE PROGRAM

PHEASANT RELEASES

For FY 2013, the program set aside \$106,563 for the pheasant release program. Nearly 9,000 pheasants were released, and the program expended \$79,568. During FY 2014, the program set aside \$93,287 for the bird release program and expended \$75,535 for the release of 8,652 pen-reared pheasants (Table 7). Pen-reared pheasants were released into areas with suitable habitats between August 1 and September 15 (Figure 10).

Table 7. Summary of pheasant release applications and contracts awarded by region.

Region	FY 2013			FY 2014		
	# Contracts	# Pheasants	# Access (ac)	# Contracts	# Pheasants	# Access (ac)
4	2	230	4,410	4	550	3,879
6	66	7,435	75,723	44	5,827	66,750
7	12	1,316	45,711	14	2,275	45,137
TOTAL	80	8,981	81,449	62	8,652	115,766



Figure 10. Pheasants survey their new habitat before taking flight (Region 4).

TURKEY TRANSPLANTS

No wild turkey transplants occurred during the biennium; however Region 4 has been working on a possible turkey transplant project. Wild turkey numbers in eastern Montana, the likely source areas for Merriam's turkeys, are generally well below average. As numbers recover, more will be available for trap and transplant.

SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING

Supplemental feeding did not occur in Region 6 during the biennium. Monitoring of winter conditions on established routes was conducted from January through March. Winter conditions remained relatively mild to average, indicating feeding criteria were not met.

UPLAND GAME BIRD HABITAT ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND STATUS

The UGBEP funds habitat enhancements and conservation in partnership with landowners, organizations, state and federal government agencies, and other funding sources. During the biennium, the UGBEP enrolled 142 projects (see Page 22, Table 9) comprised of over 19,000 project acres that enhanced or conserved upland game bird habitats. Project types included

establishments of nesting cover, food plots, shelterbelts, native rangeland restoration, grazing management, and conservation of CRP lands. Also as a result of these projects, over 111,000 acres of land were available for public upland game bird hunting, which provided an estimated 13,000 hunter-days annually. Figure 11 shows the productive outcome of a newly established food plot.

During the biennium, the program obligated \$519,437 for habitat enhancement projects. All UGBEP contracts received funding or in-kind contributions from a variety of sources including private landowners, USDA programs, Pheasants Forever chapters, BLM, US Forest Service, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Overall, UGBEP funds made up about 49% of total project costs.

As of December 2014, the UGBEP has 376 active habitat enhancement contracts comprising over 373,000 project acres with over 823,000 acres available for public upland game bird hunting. Table 8 provides a summary of active UGBEP contracts since FY 2008.

Table 8. Summary of active UGBEP projects from past UGBEP reports.

Biennium Report	#UGBEP Contracts (Active)	Project Acres	Access Acres
FY 2013/FY 2014	376	373,000	823,000
FY11/FY12	256	300,000	675,000
FY09/FY10	301	320,000	770,000
FY07/FY08	268	330,000	800,000



Figure 11. Sharp-tailed grouse congregate in an established food and cover plot (Region 7).

Table 9. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Aspen Regeneration (USFS)	5	Carbon	04/15/13	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$0	\$60,000	50	50
CP 37 - Add-on Rental Payment	6	Sheridan	08/01/12	\$37,320	\$0	\$0	\$37,320	573	921
CP 37 - Renovation	6	Sheridan	08/01/12	\$4,945	\$0	\$12,245	\$17,190	573	921
CRP Seed Cost-Share (BMA)	6	Daniels	07/10/12	\$3,504	\$1,139	\$4,643	\$9,286	219	1,910
CRP Seed Cost-Share	6	Daniels	07/16/12	\$5,328	\$1,776	\$14,208	\$21,312	333	480
CRP Seed Cost-Share	6	Daniels	10/15/13	\$5,900	\$2,528	\$8,429	\$16,857	295	1,080
CRP Seed Cost-Share	6	Daniels	05/06/14	\$5,060	\$2,169	\$7,229	\$14,458	253	640
CRP Seed Cost-Share	6	Sheridan	10/16/13	\$3,696	\$1,584	\$5,280	\$10,560	185	3,160
CRP Seed Cost-Share	7	Garfield	09/21/12	\$3,952	\$1,284	\$5,236	\$10,472	247	938
CRP Seed Cost-Share	7	Garfield	09/21/12	\$1,888	\$614	\$2,502	\$5,004	118	1,908
CRP Seed Cost-Share	7	McCone	03/25/14	\$5,360	\$2,144	\$7,512	\$15,016	268	320
CRP Seed Cost-Share	7	McCone	07/18/12	\$1,760	\$572	\$2,332	\$4,664	110	1,280
Grazing Management	6	Richland	07/01/13	\$45,263	\$15,087	\$0	\$60,350	1,245	3,365

Table 9 – Continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Native Rangeland Seeding (USFWS)	6	Phillips	05/05/14	\$1,242	\$710	\$0	\$1,952	20	15,500
Nesting Cover (WMA)	4	Teton	04/22/13	\$2,406	\$4,500	\$0	\$6,906	25	12,000
Nesting Cover (WMA)	4	Teton	04/22/13	\$500	\$2,250	\$0	\$2,750	10	12,000 *
Nesting Cover (WMA)	4	Teton	04/22/13	\$5,775	\$10,800	\$0	\$16,575	60	12,000 *
Nesting Cover (WMA)	6	Phillips	11/26/12	\$600	\$410	\$761	\$1,771	40	400
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Cascade	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,600	\$7,600	152	163
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Cascade	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$2,650	\$2,650	106	118
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Cascade	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	262
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Cascade	09/01/13	\$1,700	\$0	\$0	\$1,700	34	310
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Chouteau	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,400	\$6,400	160	511
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Chouteau	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$5,840	\$5,840	146	240
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Chouteau	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$5,600	\$5,600	155	315
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Chouteau	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$5,600	\$5,600	160	398

* Access acres are accounted for in another project that is part of the same UGBEP contract. These figures are not included in the summary total.

Table 9 – Continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

MONTANA UPLAND GAME BIRD ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

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Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Chouteau	09/01/13	\$7,950	\$0	\$0	\$7,950	159	1,548
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Chouteau	09/01/13	\$5,600	\$0	\$0	\$5,600	160	1,075
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Chouteau	09/01/13	\$5,600	\$0	\$0	\$5,600	160	640
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Glacier	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	286
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Pondera	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$3,600	\$3,600	90	482
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Pondera	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$1,750	\$1,750	70	482*
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Pondera	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	424
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Pondera	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Pondera	09/01/13	\$5,000	\$0	\$0	\$5,000	100	116
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,400	\$6,400	160	332
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,120	\$6,120	153	232
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$3,125	\$3,125	125	158
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	178

* Access acres are accounted for in another project that is part of the same UGBEP contract and are not included in the summary total.

Table 9 – Continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$1,040	\$1,040	26	238
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$2,475	\$2,475	99	139
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$5,005	\$5,005	143	158
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/13	\$3,200	\$0	\$0	\$3,200	160	483
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/13	\$3,200	\$0	\$0	\$3,200	160	318
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/13	\$990	\$0	\$0	\$990	33	60
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/13	\$4,025	\$0	\$0	\$4,025	115	142
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,635	\$8,635	157	221
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	231
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	220
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$5,960	\$5,960	149	232
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,800	\$4,800	160	257
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/13	\$1,080	\$0	\$0	\$1,080	24	40

Table 9 – Continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

MONTANA UPLAND GAME BIRD ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

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Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/13	\$9,170	\$0	\$0	\$9,170	131	288
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/13	\$7,650	\$0	\$0	\$7,650	153	301
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/13	\$7,020	\$0	\$0	\$7,020	156	321
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/13	\$1,330	\$0	\$0	\$1,330	38	178
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/13	\$7,020	\$0	\$0	\$7,020	117	257
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/13	\$6,120	\$0	\$0	\$6,120	136	316
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/13	\$6,255	\$0	\$0	\$6,255	139	588
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/13	\$3,120	\$0	\$0	\$3,120	52	501
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/13	\$7,200	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	160	300
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/13	\$7,200	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	160	515
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	546
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,800	\$4,800	160	312
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	640

Table 9 – Continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

MONTANA UPLAND GAME BIRD ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM	Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
					UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	520
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,560	\$4,560	152	159
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,630	\$7,630	160	760
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	160
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,400	\$6,400	160	400
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	320
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	367
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/13	\$1,820	\$0	\$0	\$1,820	91	109
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/13	\$2,070	\$0	\$0	\$2,070	46	240
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/13	\$1,890	\$0	\$0	\$1,890	42	297
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/13	\$5,150	\$0	\$0	\$5,150	103	395
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/13	\$5,145	\$0	\$0	\$5,145	147	245
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Dawson	09/01/13	\$7,200	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	160	293

Table 9 – Continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,200	\$6,200	155	159
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	480
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	212
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	480
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/13	\$5,600	\$0	\$0	\$5,600	160	640
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/13	\$6,120	\$0	\$0	\$6,120	153	160
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/13	\$4,800	\$0	\$0	\$4,800	120	160
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/13	\$6,400	\$0	\$0	\$6,400	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/13	\$5,600	\$0	\$0	\$5,600	160	276
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/13	\$4,725	\$0	\$0	\$4,725	135	480
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Richland	09/01/13	\$2,640	\$0	\$0	\$2,640	132	640
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Richland	09/01/13	\$5,600	\$0	\$0	\$5,600	112	480

Table 9 – Continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Roosevelt	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$3,750	\$3,750	150	310
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Sheridan	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$2,950	\$2,950	156	274
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Sheridan	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$3,875	\$3,875	155	160
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Sheridan	09/01/13	\$3,300	\$0	\$0	\$3,300	66	66
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Sheridan	09/01/13	\$6,300	\$0	\$0	\$6,300	126	126
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Sheridan	09/01/13	\$3,200	\$0	\$0	\$3,200	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Sheridan	09/01/13	\$2,295	\$0	\$0	\$2,295	51	125
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Valley	09/01/13	\$6,500	\$0	\$0	\$6,500	130	160
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,400	\$6,400	160	625
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,000	\$6,000	150	310
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	320

Table 9 – Continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	640
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,120	\$4,120	103	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,770	\$4,770	106	114
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/13	\$3,510	\$0	\$0	\$3,510	78	398
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/13	\$7,020	\$0	\$0	\$7,020	156	640
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/13	\$7,200	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	160	597
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/13	\$3,015	\$0	\$0	\$3,015	67	273
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/13	\$6,400	\$0	\$0	\$6,400	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/13	\$5,600	\$0	\$0	\$5,600	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Fallon	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	248
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Fallon	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,400	\$6,400	160	600

Table 9 – Continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

MONTANA UPLAND GAME BIRD ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM	Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
					UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,000	\$7,000	140	290
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	195
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	McCone	09/01/13	\$8,000	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	160	320
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	McCone	09/01/13	\$7,200	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	160	320
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	McCone	09/01/13	\$7,200	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	160	320
	Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Richland	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$1,000	\$1,000	20	310
	Shelterbelts	6	Daniels	10/05/12	\$13,680	\$6,981	\$0	\$20,660	5	2,640
	Shelterbelts	6	Daniels	01/08/14	\$8,108	\$3,478	\$0	\$11,586	5	320
	Shelterbelts (WMA)	6	Phillips	11/26/12	\$2,652	\$1,190	\$7,220	\$11,062	5	400
	Winter Food or Cover Plots (WMA)	1	Lake	06/25/13	\$4,500	\$6,500	\$0	\$11,000	120	4,000
	Winter Food or Cover Plots (WMA)	4	Teton	04/01/13	\$160	\$720	\$0	\$880	4	12,000 *
	Winter Food or Cover Plots	4	Teton	04/01/13	\$1,390	\$3,640	\$0	\$5,030	20	12,000 *
	Winter Food or Cover Plots	6	Daniels	07/02/13	\$393	\$150	\$57	\$600	3	320

* Access acres are accounted for in another project that is part of the same UGBEP contract and are not included in the summary total.

Table 9 – Continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Winter Food or Cover Plots	6	Dawson	07/02/13	\$750	\$250	\$0	\$1,000	5	320
Winter Food or Cover Plots	7	Carter	07/02/13	\$1,500	\$500	\$0	\$2,000	10	1,440
Winter Food or Cover Plots	7	Carter	06/13/14	\$26,250	\$1,750	\$0	\$28,000	35	4,160
Winter Food or Cover Plots	7	Carter	06/20/14	\$25,725	\$8,575	\$0	\$34,300	30	1,440
Winter Food or Cover Plots	7	Custer	09/20/12	\$1,350	\$450	\$0	\$1,800	9	5,440
Winter Food or Cover Plots	7	Dawson	07/02/13	\$1,500	\$500	\$0	\$2,000	10	320
Winter Food or Cover Plots (BMA)	7	Dawson	07/02/13	\$13,500	\$4,500	\$0	\$18,000	40	40
Winter Food or Cover Plots	7	Dawson	06/13/14	\$7,500	\$22,500	\$0	\$30,000	30	2,628
Winter Food or Cover Plots	7	Fallon	09/15/12	\$900	\$300	\$0	\$1,200	6	1,640
Winter Food or Cover Plots	7	McCone	09/20/12	\$1,500	\$500	\$0	\$2,000	10	2,240
Winter Food or Cover Plots	7	McCone	09/21/12	\$900	\$300	\$0	\$1,200	6	2,240
Winter Food or Cover Plots (BMA)	7	Prairie	07/02/13	\$750	\$250	\$0	\$1,000	5	1,280
SUMMARY: 142 Projects				\$519,437	\$140,601	\$393,709	\$1,053,747	19,142	111,024

PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS MONTANA

Throughout its history, the UGBEP has worked with a variety of partners, including many landowners, state, federal, and county government agencies and nongovernment conservation partners. Table 10 summarizes the growing list of agency and organization partners the program has teamed up with to enhance habitats for upland game birds.

Table 10. Summary of agencies and conservation groups who partnered on UGBEP projects.

Region 1	Region 3
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Five Valleys Chapter of Pheasants Forever Mission Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever	Beaverhead Chapter of Pheasants Forever Bureau of Land Management, Butte Field Office Gallatin Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever Headwaters Chapter of Pheasants Forever Lazy Game Birds NRCS Field Office, Beaverhead County US Fish Wildlife Service – Arctic Grayling Program
Region 4	Region 5
Central Montana Chapter of Pheasants Forever DNRC State Lands, Conrad Unit DNRC State Lands, Lewistown Unit East End Colony Eastslope Kennels and Game Birds Farm Service Agency, Cascade County Farm Service Agency, Chouteau Farm Service Agency, Glacier County Farm Service Agency, Pondera County Farm Service Agency, Teton County Farm Service Agency, Toole County Habitat Forever, Lewistown Headwaters Chapter of Pheasants Forever MT Salinity Control Association NRCS Field Office, Cascade County NRCS Field Office, Chouteau County NRCS Field Office, Glacier County NRCS Field Office, Pondera County NRCS Field Office, Teton County NRCS Field Office, Toole County Pondera County Conservation District Upper Missouri Chapter of Pheasants Forever	Billings Rod & Gun Club Bureau of Land Management, Billings Field Office Conoco Phillips-Phillips 66 Habitat Forever, Billings Montana Chapter of Safari Club Otter Creek Gamebird Farm Yellowstone Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever

Region 6	Region 7
Daniels County Conservation District East End Colony Farm Service Agency, Daniels County Farm Service Agency, McCone County Farm Service Agency, Roosevelt County Farm Service Agency, Sheridan County Farm Service Agency, Valley County Flaxville Chapter of Pheasants Forever Gallatin Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever National Wild Turkey Federation NRCS Field Office, Sheridan County NRCS Field Office, Roosevelt County NRCS Field Office, Daniels County Roosevelt County Conservation District Sheridan County Commissioners Sheridan County Conservation District Sheridan County Road Department Sorenson Pheasant Farm USFWS Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge	Birds of Plenty NRCS Field Office, Richland County BLM, Miles City Office Medicine Rocks Kennel NRCS Field Office, Carter County NRCS Field Office, Baker County NRCS Field Office, Custer County Richland County Chapter of Pheasants Forever Sandstone Chapter Pheasants Forever Tongue River Chapter PF

PROGRAM EVALUATION AND ONGOING ADAPTATION

The UGBEP receives evaluation or feedback in a number of ways, which helps the program adapt to changing circumstances, improving performance. These include: (1) project monitoring, (2) ongoing assessment of needs, (3) input from the UGBEP CAC, and (4) hunter and cooperator feedback.

MONITORING CONTRACTS

During the biennium, the program biologists visited a total of 154 active UGBHEP project sites to evaluate the status and productivity of shelterbelts, food and cover plots, dense nesting cover, and grazing management projects. In addition, nearly 70 pheasant release sites were evaluated initially during February and again late summer when releases occurred to ensure habitat cover remained unchanged. For all visited project sites, the staff posted new program signs and updated landowner contact information as needed.

UGBEP CITIZENS' ADVISORY COUNCIL

The council met twice each year with department staff to review work planning and progress, receive public input, and to make program recommendations. The following items highlight the council's recommendations over the past biennium:

- The council has been extremely supportive of the new Open Fields program and strongly encouraged the department to expand the program;
- After an initial discussion on habitat lease options, the council encouraged the Department to investigate options for other land leasing arrangements;
- Support for changes to field staff positions by filling vacant positions with qualified candidates who, at a minimum, had a bachelor's degree;
- Investigate opportunities to accomplish farming work through partnerships or contracted services.
- In the future, invite area legislators to participate in habitat tours that coincide with council meetings to witness first-hand the importance of habitat enhancements.
- Public opinion and input matter to program success. The department should continue to be receptive to public comment.
- Develop a communication strategy that targets landowners, hunters, public, and the legislature.
- Pursue renewing contracts for projects occurring in Denton and Billings.

UGBEP HUNTER SURVEY

An UGBEP survey is available online and year-round with the link published in the UGBEP Projects Access Guide. During the biennium, 236 respondents provided input on the UGBEP program, upland game bird hunting in general, or subjects unrelated to the program. Of the 236 respondents, 149 hunters were non-residents and 87 were Montana residents (Table 11). Fifty-six respondents included their level of satisfaction with the UGBEP (Table 12). Table 13 provides a representation of the comments received specific to the program. Not all comments are shown.

Table 11. Summary of respondents and use of UGBEP projects.

	FY 2013		FY 2014	
	# Respondents	# of hunters that visited UGBEP Projects	# Respondents	# of hunters that visited UGBEP Projects
Resident	48	34	39	14
Nonresident	122	15	27	12
Total	170	49	66	26

Table 12. Level of satisfaction from hunters that visited UGBEP projects.

	FY 2013					FY 2014				
	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dis-satisfied	Very Dis-satisfied	Un-known	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dis-satisfied	Very Dis-satisfied	Un-known
Resident	7	14	4	2	7	3	2	2	1	6
Nonresident	5	4	2	1	3	3	5	1	0	3
Total	12	18	6	3	10	6	7	3	1	9

Table 13. Compilation of abbreviated comments received by hunters in regard to the UGBEP.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Providing excellent hunting opportunities is what keeps hunter like me coming back and pumping money into local economies.	The program appears to be working as the sites I visited appeared to have good cover and feed on or adjacent to the property. The UGBEP information package was very useful for a hunter new to the area. Good Job.	Release more pheasants, get more areas near Bozeman and Livingston.	The properties in the program have to be signed. Three of the 4 I hunted had no signs.
Thank you for making non-residents feel welcome.	I would not restrict the total number of days a hunter can access the location. Especially if there aren't any other hunters trying to use that area (i.e. no waiting list).	Print guide earlier and mail out.	[Need] easily identified signs and area marking, GPS locations lat/lon UTM's
Nice program, please continue and add more properties.	Need good oversight on management and maintenance to insure that the habitat improvements are sustained over time. Good program.	More areas in Southeast section of the state.	
Property lines need to be marked better for state sections, blm, etc	Integrate the UGEP information into the Block Management Guide....maybe more like a Hunter access guide.	More precise mapping of BMA land and private property.	
Over the years, this program has been very successful. Please keep it going.	Need more ugbeep areas...	Better access directions and limits of the area open to hunting.	

OPEN FIELDS HUNTER SURVEY

The program also sought input from hunters who hunted on Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters projects to fulfill requirements of the FY 2013 VPA-HIP grant.

During the biennium, 14 hunters participated in the survey, with only 9 hunters (4 resident/5 nonresident) reporting that they hunted on Open Fields properties. Hunters were asked to provide input on their harvest and their level of satisfaction with their hunting experience, the habitat quality, the Hunting Atlas, and signage. Their general level of satisfaction is reported in Table 14. A compilation of comments are noted in Table 15.

Table 14. Level of satisfaction from hunters that visited UGBEP projects during the biennium.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Resident	3	1		0
Nonresident	2	2	1	0
Total	5	3	1	0

Table 15. Compilation of abbreviated comments received by hunters in regard to the UGBEP.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Good cover and not a lot of hunting pressure, this was a good success as far as I am concerned. Well satisfied.	Great Idea! We could use more of these, good for everyone, land owners and hunters.	I had an absolutely HORRIBLE time finding most of the MT properties.
This is a great new opportunity for bird hunters. Please expand this program.	Another great MT opportunity. It would be nice if no pheasants were planted on these properties.	
Dogs put up lots and lots of sharp-tail and partridge in a short amount of time. GREAT AREA and THANK YOU so much! The OF areas around Vida and Circle are a real blessing and let us know what we can do to help this program thrive.		
It's just great to see a state take this much interest in hunter access. I didn't hunt birds in your state, but will this year. Thanks for all you Folks do!		

COOPERATOR FEEDBACK

Every other year, the program sends letters to cooperators who have actively enrolled projects in the UGBEP. The purpose of the letter is to make sure contact information is current and that the method hunters use to contact the cooperator is up to date. Additionally, landowners are able to provide information and input to the program. In FY 2014, the program sent out 192 letters to cooperators. FWP received approximately 90 responses, most of which were updates on how hunters should contact cooperators for hunting permission. Approximately 25 cooperators indicated they were interested in other cost-share opportunities.

PROGRAM REFINEMENT AND ADAPTATION

In response to feedback described above, the UGBEP continues to be improved. The program also requires ongoing adaptation to changes in farming practices, landowner interests, farm bill, and new technologies and science.

The following are examples of recent program innovations, refinements, and adaptations.

- Open Fields enrollments, using solely UGBEP funding, were conducted in FY 2014, concurrently with the general CRP sign-up.

- **Management leases:** Partly in response to the popularity of Open Fields projects (as heard from hunters, FWP staff, and the UGBEP CAC) and in recognition that there are many highly productive upland game bird habitats in addition to CRP fields, the program is currently exploring ways to expand lease arrangements to conserve other high value habitats and to increase recreational opportunities. Habitats might include sagebrush-grasslands, mature shelterbelts, productive riparian areas, and other high value cover types.
- **Habitat Specialist Positions:** After receiving input from regional managers and the UGBEP CAC, the three field positions dedicated to UGBEP were re-evaluated and adjusted to more accurately reflect their technical (non-policy) and focused scope of responsibility. The revised positions now require a minimum of a bachelor's degree in natural resources (in their original form they required a masters degree), which has helped broaden the field of potential applicants.
- **Contracts were renewed with Habitat Forever** to continue wildlife enhancements through farming activities in the Denton and Billings areas.
- **Brood rearing cover:** Fairly new to the program, this cover consists of a mix of forbs that provide chicks with an abundant food source (i.e., insects) while also providing escape cover.
- **Eastern redcedar:** A newly available species in UGBEP shelterbelt plantings, this conifer provides food and cover for pheasants and other wildlife. The shrub is commonly grown in the Dakotas and has recently been planted in shelterbelts in northeast Montana. Staff are monitoring survival rates.
- **Russian olive:** Once a popular planting in Montana's shelterbelts, and known for its effective growth form, fruit, and drought tolerance, this tree is now regulated and cannot be sold or planted in Montana as of 2010. Currently, there are no similar substitutes; however the USDA Plant Materials Center in Bridger is evaluating Silverscape © olive, a Russian olive-silverberry hybrid that may have potential to offer similar food and cover benefits to upland game birds and other wildlife.
- **During the biennium, review and reconciliation of habitat enhancement contracts with the UGBEP database continued.** An additional database feature was incorporated to track project expenditures to determine the amount of unspent funds that remained contractually obligated. Through time and further evaluation, the project tracking database will continue to be enhanced with additional functionality.
- **For hunting purposes, the program is also keeping pace with current technology.** Beginning in FY 2014, Open Fields projects were available to hunters via geospatial maps in Portable Document Format (PDF). This allows hunters with portable devices (e.g., smart phones) to navigate to Open Fields project sites. Once the geospatial PDF maps are loaded on mobile devices, hunters can identify their position in the field relative to important features on the map, such as roads, without the need of an internet connection or cell coverage. Figure 12 is a screenshot of an Open Fields geospatial map on a mobile "smart" phone.

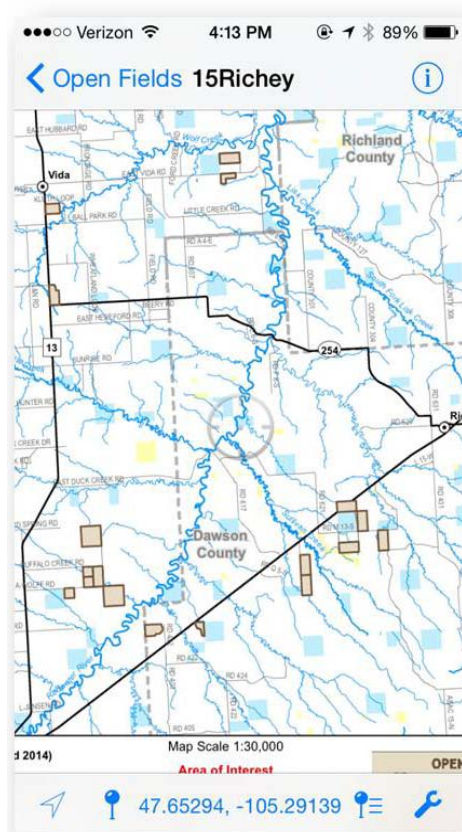


Figure 12. Open Fields map displayed on an Apple iPhone.

FY 2015 PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

In addition to continued implementation of all aspects of the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program described above, the following program objectives scheduled during FY 2015 are described below.

STAFFING

During FY 2014, the 3 Habitat Specialist positions became vacant; however, the department recently filled 2 of the 3 positions in October and December 2014, and plans are underway to fill the third position in early 2015. These positions will continue to establish and monitor UGBEP projects with particular emphasis on developments outlined below.

OPEN FIELDS FOR GAME BIRD HUNTERS

Towards the end of FY 2014, FWP was awarded another Voluntary Public Access-Habitat Incentives Program grant to expand enrollment of Open Fields projects. The 3-year grant award amounted to \$491,000. The UGBEP will provide a \$450,000 match. The goals of Open

Fields projects are to (1) help retain lands enrolled in CRP, (2) enroll productive habitats currently enrolled in USDA conservation programs, and (3) provide incentives to landowners for habitat conservation and public access. Through this grant, FWP plans to contact 2,000 new landowners with direct mailings and enroll 150 landowners, conserving up to 48,000 acres of CRP and other productive game bird habitat. Program implementation will begin early in 2015.

NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE FOUNDATION (NFWF) GRANT

In FY 2014, FWP submitted a pre-proposal seeking \$180,000 to conserve Montana's priority grasslands. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation responded with a request that FWP submit a full proposal. FWP proposed to offer 30-year conservation leases to private landowners in priority grassland and wetland-grassland complexes in north-central Montana. The UGBEP committed \$200,000 for match for leases that protect habitat for sage-grouse or other upland game birds. FWP's Migratory Bird Habitat Program also committed up to \$100,000 for leases that protect wetland-grassland areas for waterfowl and other migratory birds. In exchange for a contract payment, landowners would agree not to convert enrolled grasslands to cropland agriculture for the 30-year contract period. Other traditional land uses, such as grazing would be encouraged, not prohibited.

Grant awards are anticipated in May 2015. If FWP is successful, program implementation will begin shortly thereafter.

PHEASANT BEND CONSERVATION EASEMENT

Earlier in FY15, the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission approved the acquisition of the Pheasant Bend Conservation Easement that would protect the conservation and agricultural values that exist on the property. The UGBEP has committed \$100,000 toward this project.

NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION COOPERATIVE WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

In western Montana, forest resource managers are faced with reduced budgets and limited staff capacity, which often limit the timely implementation of beneficial forest management practices. The development of a Cooperative Wildlife Biologist position will assist U.S. Forest Service (USFS), FWP, and the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) in the delivery of sound beneficial forest management practices that improve wildlife habitat and access on public and private lands.

A cooperative agreement will be implemented to jointly fund a NWTF wildlife biologist position in Missoula (FWP Region 2). This position will be supported financially by the USFS and FWP. The primary duties of this position will be to promote, design and implement management activities that enhance wild turkey and forest grouse habitats while promoting healthy forest ecosystems.